

DEFENSE DAILY

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SOVIET AIRBORNE LASER LABORATORY DESTROYED

The Soviet Union's airborne high energy laser test vehicle program has suffered a catastrophic failure resulting in the loss of the program's only aircraft laboratory.

The Soviet laboratory, a converted Il-76 transport, apparently suffered a fire that totally destroyed the aircraft on the ground at the air base at Shchelkovo two weeks ago. Reconnaissance satellite photographs had recorded the high energy laser test vehicle at the Shchelkovo base only hours before the fire. Subsequent photography showed the destruction of the aircraft.

The Il-76 aircraft equipped by the Soviets as their airborne high energy laser research vehicle had been in use for several years and its mission is believed to have been similar to the U.S. Air Force ALL (Airborne Laser Laboratory), a highly instrumented NKC-135 aircraft investigating the integration and operation of the high energy laser from the airborne laboratory to an airborne target.

The Air Force completed the initial phases of the ALL research program on July 25, 1983, and the aircraft is now in a flight readiness status at Kirtland AFB, N.M. for "potential future missions," Air Force officials said yesterday.

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